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ABSTRACT

Students of urban, commuter universities frequently make unlikely candidates for a team teaching situation in a black elementary school. Methods teachers at the University of Toledo, therefore, decided to hold classes at a multi-unit school in the Toledo ghetto. The objectives were twofold: to teach undergraduates how to team teach social studies, and provide an opportunity to teach black children. Students were formed into nine teaching teams, about two per grade level. All members of a team received the same grade. Teams were given the responsibility for planning a social studies curriculum unit which they would then teach to a group of 6 to 12 black children two afternoons per week for five weeks. Lectures, which later became discussion sessions, and evaluation and planning time accompanied the teaching experience. As the students got to know the children, they made progressively fewer presentations and used more techniques to get the children involved in the learning process. The objectives were achieved, largely because: the ratio of child to teacher was small; the team concept allowed differing levels of creativity to be equalized; topics chosen by the undergraduates were relevant; and the availability of planning time encouraged the students to be flexible. (JLB)

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TEACHING METHODS COURSES IN AN INNER CITY SCHOOL

The University of Toledo is an urban university of over ten thousand undergraduates. The students are not unlike those in many other city universities. They are primarily commuters whose parents have not attended college. If their high school marks had been higher and their parents had more money, they might have attended college elsewhere. Many of them have full time employment and take only a few courses at a time. They chose their courses so that their academic schedule does not interfere with their work schedule. Even those who are not employed tend to drive home as soon as they finish their classes.

College life at an urban, commuting university is not glamorous.

As a result, many of the students believe that society has not been as generous to them as it has been to others. Many have had to struggle to stay in the university and if they have made it to their junior year they have a feeling of self satisfaction. To them, Rugged Individualism makes sense. Because of this attitude their ability to work co-operatively with classmates is handicapped.

Their attitudes about social injustice--even more than their attitudes towards co-operation--reflect their environment. Their empathy for blacks is often not only limited but in some cases totally absent. Some individuals are not even ashamed of being bigots.

They are indeed uniquely unlikely candidates for a team teaching situation in a black, elementary school. Because of this, because of the needs of our undergraduates, those of us who teach methods courses decided to leave the campus and to hold our classes in Martin Luther King, Jr. School, a multi-unit school in the center of the Toledo ghetto.

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We wanted to do two things: we wanted to teach the undergraduates how to team teach social studies and secondly, but of more importance, we wanted to give them an opportunity to teach black children; an opportunity to know the children as individuals. Simply put, we wanted them to fall in love with black children. It was assumed that if this happened they would discover the universality of children--and of man.

Our strategy was to structure a teaching situation in which the undergraduates would be guaranteed success; a situation in which they could implement the theories that they had learned in education courses and discover that they are effective.

At the first class meeting the undergraduates were divided up into discussion groups based on grade level interest. Since few of the undergraduates knew more than one person in the class, this meeting and the following one were used to encourage the students to get to know one another. They were told at the beginning of the first meeting that at the end of the second meeting they would be required to form their own teaching teams and that the majority of the remaining class time would be spent team teaching black children.

At the start of the first class there were five discussion groups. At the end of the second meeting the five discussion groups were reformed into nine teaching teams, roughly two per grade level.

The students experienced some anxiety when they were told that all the individuals in the team would receive the same mark. However, the anxiety was not extreme as they knew that their professor--like many other education professors--tended to be more generous with A's and B's than faculty members from other departments.

The team mark and their knowledge that their professor had a strong bias towards team teaching encouraged them to work successfully as a team, as well as the fact that they were told part of their grade would be determined by their ability to function cooperatively.

Once formed, the teams were given the responsibility of planning a social studies curriculum unit that then would teach to a group of six to twelve black children. They were told that every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon for five weeks they would be at King School.

Their objectives and learning activities were written under my supervision and were approved by the unit leaders at King school. But once their plans were approved, for all practical purposes the undergraduates were operating their own school. For ten sessions, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM every Tuesday and Thursday, the teams were totally responsible for the instructional program of the children.

Their classrooms included a corner of the library, a conference room, the teacher's work room, the halls and a couple of empty classrooms. (I don't have statistical data on this but teams that had to use the halls tended to go on more field trips than other groups.)

Obviously one of the major barriers to initiating a program like this is the need for a large block of time. Students will need additional time to drive from the campus to the school; they need time to set up their materials and they need time to plan their instruction.

We were fortunate at the University of Toledo in that the methods students are scheduled for a four hour block of time. The students are required to enroll concurrently in science and social studies methods for a ten week quarter. The courses are scheduled back-to-back. Section one

of social studies meets from noon to 2:00 PM. From 2:00 to 4:00 PM the section meets with their science methods instructor. The science methods professor and I unofficially changed this ten week quarter to two five week modules. Instead of having social studies for four hours a week for ten weeks, we met eight hours a week for five weeks.

The time was allocated as follows: from noon to 1:00 a lecture was scheduled. (Students with 11:00 classes tended to arrive late and we accepted this as a problem we could not resolve.) From 1:00 to 3:00 PM the undergraduates taught the children. The hour from 3:00 to 4:00 PM consisted of meetings of the teams to plan the following session's lessons; to evaluate what they had done and to prepare a report of their experience. This report was used in lieu of an examination. The lecture period, the one-hour time block at noon, was the most frustrating for me and the students. I like to lecture and being a traditionalist, I was concerned because my "class" time was only a quarter of what it was under the old system. I feared that the students were being cheated of something--specifically they were chated of listening to me. I tried to compensate for what I originally thought was a weakness in the program by typing my lectures and using them as handouts. The students were to read four lectures each noon and raise questions about them. Like other traditionalists, I was confronted by the familiar: "Dr. Ahern, this may be off the subject, but I was wondering..." The off-the-subject syndrome happened often enough that I mended my ways. The lecture period became a discussion: the students raised questions about their immediate problems: how do you handle children with diverse interests? How do you motivate children? How do you promote creativity? How do you deal with discipline problems?

Conducting discussion sessions with forty-three undergraduates cramped into a traditional sized classroom is difficult. It is even more difficult when the undergraduates are juggling paper bags full of instructional material. It might be said that among their other weaknesses, urban university students are poor paper bag jugglers. A pumpkin rolled by me once as I was explaining re-enforcement techniques. A paper bag of cement split open as I was encouraging them to use the project method. Once I had to compete for the class's attention with a two week old lamb.

Fortunately the period from 1:00 to 3:00 was less traumatic. Originally we had planned for the students to teach one group of children for forty-five minutes, spend fifteen minutes evaluating what they had done, and then reteach it to a different group. We wanted to use the micro-teaching technique but it was not well received. The undergraduates wanted the same children for the entire two hour period. We agreed. The type of experiences that they were providing did not lend itself to micro-teaching analysis.

As they grew to know the children, they made less presentations and instead used techniques to get the children involved in the learning process. Project cards, experience books, child-made media, and children-teaching-children began to become as popular as field trips, guest speakers, and commercial media.

We had problems, which fortunately time does not permit me to discuss, but I think we achieved our goals. The students learned to team teach elementary social studies and they fell in love with the children at King school, (although I am hardly an objective observer).

I think the program worked because of a number of factors: the ratio of child to teacher was small, which reduced the likelihood of discipline problems; the team concept enables a more creative undergraduate to compensate for a less talented one; the topics chosen by the undergraduates were relevant;

and the availability of planning time encourages the students to be flexible; if a topic was not well received they changed it.

Without doubt the children loved it. They not only enjoyed it but they found value in what they were doing. Their feeling of satisfaction was transmitted to the undergraduates. This made the university students feel successful and to feel closer to the youngsters whom they had successfully taught.

In conclusion, I would like to say we intend to continue to teach our methods classes in the inner city. Besides, as one undergraduate said to me: "Who can find a place to park on campus anyway."